

Yajna (यज्ञ): A Practice to Impart and Test the Knowledge (ज्ञानम्) and the Word Power (वाक्)

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Introduction: **Rigved** is the compilation of the Ten Separate Chapters of the earliest recorded Poems composed in the North-west corner of the Indian Sub-continent, that belongs to the ancient “Oral Tradition”. The “Songs of Praise” were composed by the several generations Poets over a very long period mostly to glorify the “Deities of their Imagination” during **Yajna** Ritual.

Rigvedic word **Yajna/ यज्ञ** has its root in the vedic word *yaj* which means “to worship or honour with devotion”. Actually, **Yajna** is a small scale duplication of the “Wildfire”.

At the time of **Rigved**, **Yajna** was mainly conducted to pray and please various deities by chanting Mantras/Suktas/Richas in presence of **Agni/sacred fire** in which several offerings were made. Since **Agni/fire** acted as the medium to convey sacrifice to the Gods, **Yajna** became a link between the humans and the Rigvedic Deities.

The People who started **Yajna** rite with the chant of Mantras were the People of Ascetic Nature such as Rishis or Sage-Poets who are commonly called as the Rigvedic Priests (came to know as the **BrahmiNas** later on). In all probablites, **Yajna** was conducted in an open plain areas outside the town or on the banks of river or on the dried river beds as it was easy to offer various sacrificial items in the Fire altar in the names of the cosmic, atmospheric and land based Deities. Within a very short period, **Yajna** became the Pivot around which daily life of the Members of the Priestly Community started revolving, and the trend continued for several generations.

Now taking into account the duration of composition of **All Ten Mandalas of Rigved**, the fundamental question arises; how did the tradition of Composition of Numerous Songs continue for such a long period? **Or** Where did so many Composers come from?

It is generally agreed by many that out of total **Ten Mandalas of Rigved**, **Six Mandalas (Mandala-2 to 7)** were composed by the Poets belonging to six different Families. In other words, each of these Six Mandalas is credited to the Poetic skills of a particular Family. Remaining Four Mandalas (8, 9, 1, and 10) that were composed lately, exhibit contributions from the descendants of Poets of the Earlier Families as well as many new Poets who do not belong to the old clan culture.

In the present essay, the Two Hymns belonging to **Mandala-10; (Rv-10.71, and Rv-10.125)** have been discussed in detail in which the two different Poets have embraced the two separate subjects that are not found in any of the **Nine Earlier Composed Mandalas**.

A. Hymn Rv-10.71 that talks about the Shaping of the Knowledge-Oriented Poets/Leaders:

In eleven verses of the hymn **Rv-10.71**; the Poet has described that at the time of composition of the Last Mandala of **Rigved**, how a novice was systematically prepared as the Future Generation Priest (#- symbol indicates Griffith Translation).

Rv-10.71,1: *br̥haspate prathamam vāco aghram yat prairata nāmadheyandadhānāḥ |
yadeṣām śreṣṭham yadaripramāstipreṇā tadeṣām nihitam ghuhāvih ||*

When-men, Brhaspati, giving names to objects, sent out Vak's first and earliest utterances,

All that was excellent and spotless, treasured within them, was disclosed through their affection.

Interpretation: By taking name of **Brihaspati**, the Poet tells how the first speech or the spoken words were inducted by giving names to various objects/items present in the world. In fact, this was the first step towards the creation of **Vak/Vacha/Speech** used by the human beings in the beginning.

Rv-10.71,2: *saktumiva-tita-unā punanto yatra dhīrā manasā vācamakrata |
atrā sakhāyah sakhyāni jānate bhadraīṣāṃlakṣmīrnihitādhi vāci ||*

Where, like men cleansing corn-flour in a cribble, the wise in spirit have created language,

Friends see and recognize the marks of friendship: their speech retains the blessed sign imprinted.

Interpretation: Wise persons had improved the spoken words further very similar to sieving of barley/grain flour (by a woman) to remove the coarser particles. That way the refinement in speech occurred over a period of time. It means, some persons from the ancient generations paid special attention to the words spoken by the people of that time, and corrected them for proper use as well as their pronunciation. In this way, in the early days, an improvement in the quality of Speech did take place or the Spoken words became excellent (**Bhadra**) and prosperous (**Laxmi**).

Rv-10.71,3: *yajñena vācaḥ padavīyamāyan tāmanvavindannṛṣiṣupraviṣṭām |
tāmābhṛtyā vyadadhuḥ purutrā tāṃ saptarebhā abhi sam navante ||*

With sacrifice the trace of Vak they followed, and found her harbouring within the Rsis.

They brought her, dealt her forth in many places: seven singers make her tones resound in concert.

Interpretation: **Yajna/sacrifice** ritual had actually brought the continuous improvement in the Speech of the Priestly People through the regular competition among the Rishis, and this also caused the spread of **Vak** (also means language of the Priests) in the different places (of the world). The Voices of the Seven Singers/Hotars or the Sacrificers at the time of **Grand Yajna** (a Public Event) collectively formed a concert of the spoken words or an occasion to introduce new words.

**Rv-10.71,4: *uta tvaḥ paśyan na dadarśa vācamuta tvaḥ śṛṇvan naśṛṇotyenām |
uto tvasmai tanvaṃ vi sasre jāyeva patyauśatī suvāsāḥ ||***

One man hath ne'er seen Vak, and yet he seeth: one man hath hearing but hath never heard her.

But to another hath she shown her beauty as a fond well-dressed woman to her husband.

Interpretation: Most of the Common People would say that they have not seen the **Vak/Speech**, still they would not mind in accepting that they have felt/experienced her through the meanings conveyed by the spoken words. Many would say that they have not heard **Vak/Speech**, still they would agree on one point that, they use several spoken words in day-to-day life.

As far as the **Poet** is concerned, **Vak** stretches out of **her** conventional boundary (body) limit to exhibit **her** beauty, similar to a smart and an eager wife who purposely dresses for her husband to attract his attention. It means to say that. it is the Poet who applies beauty of the new spoken words in a skillful manner in his composition and introduces them to the audience. In other words, use of Figurative Language in the composition was the specialization of the Seasoned Rigvedic Poets.

**Rv-10.71,5: *uta tvaṃ sakhye sthirapītamāhurnainam hinvantyapivājīneṣu |
adhenvā carati māyayaiṣa vācam śuśruvānaphalāmapuṣpām ||***

One man they call a laggard, dull in friendship: they never urge him on to deeds of valour.

He wanders on in profitless illusion: the Voice he heard yields neither fruit,nor blossom.

Interpretation: Some say that they are in friendship with **Vak**, but their love is dull in nature, do not contribute anything new to vocabulary as they do not know how to milk a cow/ how to make use of an opportunity or a competition for improvisation. They think that the tree of **Vak/Speech** has already reached its saturation point or stagnation (**Sthira**), and would not yield more fruits or flowers. It means, they understand their limitation, though they are fond of her. Here **Vajina** means running in race like Asvas or participating in the competition with other Poets.

**Rv-10.71,6: *yastityāja sacividaṃ sakhāyaṃ na tasya vācyapi bhāghoasti |
yadīm śṛṇotalakam śṛṇoti nahi praveda sukr̥tasyapanthām ||***

No part in Vak hath he who hath abandoned his own dear friend who knows the truth of friendship.

Even if he hears her still in vain he listens: naught knows he of the path of righteous action.

Interpretation: A person who lives in a company of **Vak** without understanding **her** inherent strength, then he/she cannot become a contributor in fashioning knowledge using **Her**. Whenever, whatever way he/she hears **Her** goes in vain as he/she knows nothing about the use of **Vacha/spoken words** in a correct way or he/she does not find right path to make use of these words to express his/her mind.

Rv-10.71,7: *akṣaṇvantaḥ kaṇṇavantaḥ sakhāyo manojaveṣvasamābabhūvuḥ |*
ādaghnāsa upakakṣāsa u tve hradā iva snātvā utve dadṛśre ||

Unequal in the quickness of their spirit are friends endowed alike with eyes and hearing.

Some look like tanks that reach the mouth or shoulder, others like pools of water fit to bathe in.

Interpretation: All those people who give their eyes (see) and ears (hear) to **Vak** do not have equal mental capabilities to grasp her quickly.

Some see **Her** as a pond (Vak) to take complete bath or immerse themselves wholly (like a seasoned Poet), and some apathetically take a dip up to mouth or shoulder in a pond (**Vak**). It means, a person having superficial interest in **Vak** would not make long lasting impact as a Poet.

Rv-10.71,8 : *hrdā taṣṭeṣu manaso javeṣu yad brāhmaṇāḥ saṃyajantesakhāyah |*
atrāha tvam vi jahurvedyābhirohabrahmāṇo vicarantyu tve ||

When friendly Brahmans sacrifice together with mental impulse which the heart hath fashioned,

They leave one far behind through their attainments, and some who count as Brahmans wander elsewhere.

Interpretation: When the likeminded Brahmins come together to perform **Yajna**, first an idea to create a new word gets seeded in their minds, and then slowly it takes proper shape, and finally it comes out from the Heart in the form of a spoken word. In this way, they permanently leave behind a **freshly created word** through the process of **Yajna**. But some of those who just proclaim themselves as the **BrahmaNas** without participating in **Yajna** ritual, keep wandering from one place to another.

Rv-10.71,9: *ime ye nārvāṃ na paraścaranti na brāhmaṇāso nasutekarāsaḥ |*
ta ete vācamabhipadya pāpayā sirīstantram tanvate aprajajñayah ||

Those men who step not back and move not forward, nor Brahmans nor preparers of libations,

Having attained to Vak in sinful fashion spin out their thread in ignorance like spinsters.

Interpretation: Those who do not move back and forth, means remain motionless or do not go back to basics as and when necessary to understand the real meaning or root of a new word are not the Brahmins. Those who compose the **Speech** (Vacha)/ **Songs** in a bad manner (Papaya) are actually like spinning the threads in a haphazard way.

Probably the Poet wants to say that, “if a man produces short segments of thread, they are of no use, as for weaving a cloth, a continuous thread is a must”.

In other words, if a person occasionally composes a small separate verse/Richa or a phrase or a couplet would not portray him/her as a devoted Poet as he/she lacks keen interest in sacred act.

To qualify as a Rigvedic Poet, a person has to show consistency in the composition of verses so that others would come to know about his/her ability to compose purposeful Hymn/Sukta.

Special Note: Hymn Rv-1.99 belonging to Mandala-1 has only one verse in it.

Rv-10.71,10: *sarve nandanti yaśasāghatena sabhāsāhena sakhyā sakhāyah |*
kilbiṣaspr̥t̥ pituṣaṇirhyeṣāmaram̐ hito bhavativājīnāya ||

All friends are joyful in the friend who cometh in triumph, having conquered in assembly.

He is their blame-avertter, sharp witfood-provider prepared is he and fit for deed of vigour.

Interpretation: A Person after winning a Competition in an assembly of the many Poets (Open Challenge faced in front of many Competitors) makes everyone happy as he presents his flawless composition and also answers all the questions addressed to him in a proper manner.

Rv-10.71.11: *ṛcām tvaḥ poṣamāste pupuṣvān ghāyatraṁ tvo ghāyatisakvarīṣu |*
brahmā tvo vadati jātavidyām yajñasyamātrām vi mimīta u tvaḥ ||

One plies his constant task reciting verses. one sings the holy psalm in Sakvari measures.

One more, the Brahman, tells the lore of being, and one lays down the rules of sacrificing.

Interpretation: One only recites **Richas**/Verses, other sings **Shakvari** songs. Well informed or knowledgeable person (Brahmatva Vadati) then tells what he has learned (**Jata-Vidhya**) so far, and other talks about the formulation of Yajna.

Observation and Discussion on the content of the Hymn Rv-10.71

At the outset, in the first two verses of the hymn, the Poet has told the past history of the **Spoken Words**, and their sensible use by the **Old Poets** in the composed Songs of Praise.

In the verses-3 and 4. the Composer has talked about key role played by the **Yajna rite** in bringing the improvements in the **Speech** as well as the acts of **Old Rishis** in making **Vak** as the important mode of communication who perceived **Her** in a different manner than the common people of that time.

In the verses 5, 6 and 7, the Poet has commented that, there are some persons who occasionally use **Vak** to compose small couplets, but do not exhibit consistency in their Poetry. Hence their compositions do not flourish or bear no fruit indirectly means that their compositions fail to make the lasting impression. To explain further, in the verse-7, the Poet has specifically compared a person who immerses his whole body in a Pond while taking bath with other one who just dips inside the Pond upto his neck. It means to say that without complete devotion and dedication to **Vak**, anyone cannot become a reputed Rigvedic Poet. Additionally, the verse also intimates us that a person who wants to become renowned Poet must use his/her mind, eyes and

ears in the best possible way or shall regularly engage his/her two important senses to receive information from the outer world. In other words, in addition to be very good observer and the listener, a person who wishes to become a famous Poet has to have a very sharp mind.

Verse-8 is composed by the Poet to highlight the fact that when many BrahmiNs perform **Yajna** together, then every competitive Poet tries to inspire other to compose better poem of praise. It means to say that **Yajna** event acts as a **stimulant** for the Composition of the New Songs that also raises the bar of the Poems. Those who avoid taking up a challenge roam elsewhere, means some Persons do not want to participate in the contest purposely, go somewhere.

In the **Verse-9** the Poet has stressed the point that to become a well known BrahmaNa, the new Composer should step forward and backward to learn the true meanings of the words. In other words, to churn out (like extraction of Soma Juice) the knowledge/essense, every Poet needs to participate actively in the "**Intellectual Debates**" or do "**Shastrartha/शास्त्रार्थ**" with other well informed persons. The Poet has mentioned that selection and use of incorrect or bad words in the composition is as good as spinning of the shorter length threads which cannot be used for weaving a cloth, means half-hearted attempt to compose Poem becomes a futile exercise or meaningless act.

The Poet, in the **verse-10** has presented an example of a Winner Poet in the competition held in an open session wherein several other Poets did participate. In presence of many Experience Poets, in an assembly/**Sabha**, the Victor sings his/her composition and answers all the questions addressed to him/her without any hesitation and hence gladdens everybody present there.

In the last verse **Rv-10.71,11**; the Poet has explained during the **Last Phase of Rigvedic Period**, how the knowledge was transferred from one generation to other.

Probably at that time **Gurukul** system of education was in place and the training used to begin at the very early age, means when a child becomes of an age to live away from his/her parents (independent of parents). As per the information available in the verse **Rv-10.71,11**; there were total four levels of training given by the four types of Teachers/Gurus.

1. In the beginning, a newcomer (Child) used to **recite verses** composed by someone earlier. It means to say that, in the earliest part of the training, major stress was given on correct pronunciation of the words, and memorization of the selected verses.
2. After completion of the first round of reciting/learning the verses, then a pupil was prepared to sing a complete song of **Shakvari**, probably means he was taught about the basics of Chandas/Metres etc (structure of the Poems. Please see hymn **Rv-10.130** for details)
3. Then a more knowledgeable Person (Brahma) used to pass on lore/ traditional knowledge received from His Seniors/Ancestors (personal experience gained over a period of time).

4. Finally, the Senior Most Priest/Head of the Clan/Guru used to introduce **Yajna**, and its complete procedure to his Shishya/disciple.

Above information manifests that, at the time of composition of **Rigved**, there was a proper training system in place (Gurukul type), wherein a novice used to undergo systematic training under the guidance of the experts belonging to different levels.

In short, during the **Late Rigvedic Era**, there was no shortcut to gain **knowledge (ज्ञानम्)** from the Seniors. Every person who wanted to become a **Priest of Repute** had to work hard to get command over the spoken words first, then learn the basics of the Poetry such as proper use of the spoken words and the structure of the Suktas/Hymns. Then he/she had to start composing his/her own songs and present the same in presence of the Audience. It means that he/she must be mentally prepared to face the **Sabha**/assembly/gathering of the distinguished persons to establish as a **Leader**. Additionally, he/she had to participate regularly in the various contests held from time to time to become a true **Victor**. In this way, a person had to prove his/her credentials as the **Knowledge Creator** to earn the respect from others.

"ज्ञानं परमं ध्येयम्"/Knowledge is the ultimate goal

B. Story of the Spoken Words (Vak/वाक्) as explained in the Hymn Rv-10.125:

The Poet has composed the hymn as if **Vak/वाक्/Speech** is physically present in front of the Reader, and telling **Her** past and present story in the eight verses. Some scholars identify this hymn as “**Devi-Sukta**” or “**Vak-Devata**”.

All eight verses of the hymn **Rv-10.125** are discussed in following paragraphs (Symbol- # indicates Griffith Translation).

Rv-10.125,1: *aham rudrebhirvasubhiṣcarāmyahamādityairutaviśvadevaiḥ |*
aham mītrāvaruṇobhā bibharmyahamindrāghnīāhamaśvinobhā ||

I travel with the Rudras and the Vasus, with the Adityas and All-Gods I wander.

I hold aloft both Varuna and Mitra, Indra and Agni, and the Pair of Asvins.

Interpretation: **Vak** regularly moves with most of the Rigvedic Deities like Rudra, Vasus, Adityas, Varuna, Mitra, Indra, Agni and Asvin twins too.

Rv-10.125,2: *aham somamāhanasam bibharmyahan tvaṣṭāramutapūṣaṇam bhagham |
aham dadhāmi draviṇam haviṣmatesuprāvyē yajamānāya sunvate ||*

I cherish and sustain high-swelling Soma, and Tvastar I support, Pusan, and Bhaga.

I load with wealth the zealous sacrificer who pours the juice and offers his oblation.

Interpretation: **Vak** cherishes and upholds Soma, supports Tvastar, Pushan, Bhaga. **Vak** also provides wealth to a person who keenly performs sacrifice, gives oblation to please the Gods.

Rv-10.125,3 : *aham rāṣṭrī samghamanī vasūnām cikituṣī prathamāyajñiṇām |
tām mā devā vyadadhuḥ purutrābhūristhātrām bhūryāveśayantīm ||*

I am the Queen, the gatherer-up of treasures, most thoughtful, first of those who merit worship.

Thus Gods have established me in many places with many homes to enter and abide in.

Interpretation: Here **Vak** declares herself as the **Queen/Ruler** who collects the wealth for the able worshipper. **She** further says that the old Gods have purposely established **her** at many places.

Rv-10.125,4: *mayā so annamatti yo vipaśyati yaḥ prāṇiti ya īmśrṇotyuktam |
amantavo mām ta upa kṣiyanti śrudhiśruta śraddhivaṃ te vadāmi ||*

Through me alone all eat the food that feeds them,-each man who sees, brewhes, hears the word outspoken

They know it not, but yet they dwell beside me. Hear, one and all, the truth as I declare it.

Interpretation: **Vak** states that it is by her or due to her (“**maYa/मया/by me** ”), a person eats/ enjoys his food, sees, breathes and also hears the spoken words. **Vak** highlights the fact that without taking into consideration **her** presence or without giving due credit, the people continue their daily routine. Therefore, **She** asserts “All must hear, especially the People who have **Faith in truth** must hear”. It directly means all **Truth Lovers** (targeted to the Priests) shall not ignore her as **she** is very much present in every walk of life.

Rv-10.125,5: *ahameva svayamidam vadāmi juṣṭam devebhirutamānuṣebhiḥ |
yam kāmāye tam-tamughrām kṛṇomi tambrahmāṇam tam ṛṣim tam sumedhām ||*

I, verily, myself announce and utter the word that Gods and men alike shall welcome.

I make the man I love exceeding mighty, make him a sage, a Rsi, and a Brahman.

Interpretation: Here **Vak** makes it clear that the Gods and the Men strive to get hold of Her. It is **She** who transforms a man who loves **her** into a Brahmana, a Rishi, or a Wise person (Sumedha).

Rv-10.125,6: *aham rudrāya dhanurā tanomi brahmadviṣe śarave hantavāu |
aham janāya samadam kṛṇomyahan dyāvāpṛthivī āviveśa ||*

I bend the bow for Rudra that his arrow may strike and slay the hater of devotion.

I rouse and order battle for the people, and I have penetrated Earth and Heaven.

Interpretation: **Vak** claims that **she** stretches the bow of **Rudra** to destroy the knowledge haters (Brahma-dvisha). **She** further comments that **she** mentally prepares the people to go for a war. In this way, she covers both Heaven (Rudra) and Earth (the people).

Rv-10.125,7: *aham suve pitaramasya mūrdhan mama yonirapsvantaḥ samudre |
tato vi tiṣṭhe bhuvanānu viśvotāmūḥ dyāmvarṣmaṇopa sprśāmi ||*

On the world's summit I bring forth the Father: my home is in the waters, in the ocean.

Thence I extend o'er all existing creatures, and touch even yonder heaven with my forehead.

Interpretation: At first, **She** recalls her Creator/Father (who?). Then **she** introduces waters, ocean as **Her** original Home/womb. Then **She** mentions about **her** presence in every creature (land-based?). From here she goes up in the sky to touch the Heaven, means covers whole Universe.

Rv-10.125,8: *ahameva vāta iva pra vāmyārabhamāṇā bhuvanāni viśvā |
paro divā para enā prthiviyaitāvātī mahinā saṃ babhūva ||*

I breathe a strong breath like the wind and tempest, the while I hold together all existence.

Beyond this wide earth and beyond the heavens I have become so mighty in my grandeur.

Interpretation: In a self-proclaimed fashion, **Vak/वाक्** states that she first takes a deep breath and then moves like the strong wind (tempest), and encompasses all existing things. After inhaling, **She** grows in a size that takes her beyond the Heaven, and beyond the Earth. This is the way **she** has become the “All Being or All Existence or Omnipresent”.

Observation and Discussion on the content of the hymn Rv-10.125

Although **Vak/वाक्** word is missing in all eight verses, still the content of the hymn manifests that, it was composed keeping **Vak/वाक्/Speech** in mind. The most important observation is the Poet has prominently used “*Aham/I*” word in seven verses and “*maYa/मया/by me*” in the verse-4. Hence it can be called as an “*Atma-Katha/आत्मकथा*” (biography) or “*Life Story of Goddess Vak*”. Some Rigvedic Experts term it as an “*Atma-Stuti or Self-praise*” hymn as content reflects **वाक्/Vak** or **Speech** boasts about *herself*.

In the first two verses, the Poet has depicted **Vak** is close to the key Rigvedic Deities who are believed to live in Heaven and Earth (Soma). It indirectly means **Vak/वाक्** also belongs to the same class (a **Deity**). Therefore, like any other Deity/God, the Composer expects that while performing Yajna/Sacrifice all the Priests shall pay attention to **Her** to gain more wealth in future.

Note: Rv-10.125 is the only hymn dedicated to Vak in all Ten Mandalas of Rigved.

In the **verse-3**, the Poet has introduced **Vak/वाक्** as the **Queen/Rashtri** who has been intentionally established in the world by the Old Gods a long back.

Through the **verse-4**, the Poet has reminded **All Priests** that as **She** touches every sphere of life, hence those who firmly believe in **Truth** should never neglect **her** presence. The Poet has further stated that, it is due Goddess **Vak/वाक्**, the worshippers or the People of Priestly Community are making their livings. In this way, the Poet has diplomatically reprimanded fellow Priests not to forget, but give due credit to **Vak/ वाक्** as they earn their daily bread using **Vak/वाक्/Speech** while performing **Yajna** (Puja) or chanting mantras or Utterances made at that time.

The Poet has composed **Verses-5** and **6** mainly to highlight the capabilities of Goddess **Vak/वाक्**. In the **verse-5** the Poet has pointed out that **Vak** resides in both Gods and Men, and hence it is **she** who makes a person **Brahman** or **Rishi** or **Sage** which largely depends on his Knowing/ Gaining, Creating, and Presenting/Speaking Abilities. In contrast to **verse-5**, the **verse-6** actually presents **aggressive quality** of **Vak**, as in the said verse the Composer has portrayed **Vak/ वाक्/Speech** in an attacking mood, mentally ready to take on the enemies in the war (oral fight).

In the last two verses i.e. **verse-7** and **8**; the Poet has told about the birth and spread of **Vak** in the Universe. The Composer in the **verse-7** has revealed that **Vak/ वाक्/Speech** has **her** origin inside deep Ocean/waters. As per the content of **verse-8**, after taking deep breath, she quickly came out of waters/ocean and then first embraced all existing things present on the Land. From here **Vak** grew in size, and reached the Heaven. In this way, she became Omnipresent (all pervading).

In sum, in true sense, on behalf of **Vak/ वाक्/Speech**, the Poet has tried to impress upon all the members of the Priestly Community that, as they depend on **Vak** for their livelihood, **She** must be glorified in a proper way. As a matter of fact, since pre-Rigvedic era, the Rishis/the Priests used Speech/Spoken words regularly to convey their feelings about several Vedic Deities through many composed hymns, but did not bother to give credit to **Goddess Vak** by praising her in a proper manner earlier. Probably this would have provoked the Poet, who decided to compose a complete hymn to tell the **Story of Vak**. That way, it becomes an “**Atma-Katha**” of **Vak/Speech**.

Special Note: In some Rigvedic hymns of **Mandala-10**, the last few verses give better wordy picture about what was going on in the minds of the Composers. Hence before drawing verse-wise inference, the best way is to study the content of a hymn in totality, then analyse it in proper context using simple logic and common sense, and then frame the opinion.

C. The Knowledge-Driven Culture of the Priestly People of the Rigvedic Period:

The People of Rigvedic Community were definitely the knowledge-oriented persons who were very much proud of their traditions. Their ancestors devised **Yajna** ritual after seriously observing Wildfires that occur in Nature quite often. They firmly believed that **Yajna** would solve all the problems including water scarcity faced by the society of that time. During **Yajna** ceremonies, they kept on invoking the Deities of their imaginations so that one day **Indra**, their favourite God would do the needful and make their beloved river **Saraswati** who had dried up due to **Vritra** effect (drought) to flow again.

The most important point is, they not only celebrated **Yajna** event to invoke the Deities of their liking to gain some favour, but also used the same to **transfer the knowledge** from one generation to other. In other words, they created and managed a proper system to train the future generations of the Priests. That is why, they were able to **create and preserve the wealth of knowledge** in the form of **Rigvedic Hymns** that were composed by the **several generations of Poets** who lived in the North-west region of the Indian Sub-continent in the ancient period.

Rv-10.71,11 is the verse from the hymn addressed to “**Knowledge (ज्ञानम्)**” that presents methodology used by the Seniors/Gurus to prepare their disciples for future needs of the Vedic community. Training would start at an early age, when a child could live away from his/her parents. In the beginning a child was told to sing the verses composed by old poets so as to make him/her to pronounce the words in the accurate way. It means, during early part of training, by reciting the verses continuously/daily, a student used to play with the sounds to remember them to perfection.

After achieving mastery over the spoken words/accent at an early age through memorizing the verses for several months, and successful completion of the preparatory course on the basics of the Rigvedic Suktas/Hymns, then only the **Head/Guru** of Gurukul used to give in-house training of **Yajna ritual** to each student.

First, the student was taught how to make a small **Yajna-Kund**/fire altar while chanting mantras. As a practical, then the pupil would be asked to collect and position all items necessary for **Yajna** rite near already prepared altar. When all the arrangements were made, then the **Guru** would show his student how to conduct **Yajna ritual** on a small scale. After proper training for several months, **Guru** would ask the pupil to perform **Yajna** under his guidance. To give better exposure to his students, **Guru** would take him to other places where a Grand or Maha-Yajna was being carried out for a King or other Noble person. It means, the student was given “**on the job training**” before taking up it as a full-time profession.

In addition to above, the student was asked to compose own song on a given subject and present the same in presence of other contestants. This was done to test his/her sharp-wit as well as presence of mind. In this way, the student was **mentally prepared** to face the challenge posed by others. This functional test used to bring out the **leadership quality of a person**.

To summarise, correctness (proper use of the words with accurate/clear pronunciation), completeness (meaningfulness of the composed poem), consistency in the compositions of the new songs (regular participation in the competition and Yajna) as well as an innovativeness in coining and using the new words (making addition to existing vocabulary) in the composed Poems would transform an ordinary person into the **Poet of repute (knowledgeable Person)**.

The Earlier Poets had evolved and implemented a procedure for the newcomers who wanted to become the “Priests of Fame” so that there would not be any compromise or dilution of the “Standard Quality Requirements” for the future Sage-Poets.

Regarding the content of hymn **Rv-10.125**; the Poet has emphasised that, as the Priests owe everything to Goddess **Vak**, in their earlier compositions **she** should be treated at par with other Gods. It is strange but fact that the Poets of **Early Nine Mandalas** did make use of “**Vak**” for praising other Rigvedic Gods regularly, but avoided glorifying **her** in their compositions except the two verses of **Mandala-8** [1] that are given below.

Rv-8.100,10: यद वाग वदन्त्यविचेतनानि राष्ट्री देवानां निषसादमन्द्रा |
चतस्र ऊर्जं दुदुहे पयांसि कव सविदस्याः परमं जगाम ||

*yad vāgh vadantyavicetanāni rāṣṭrī devānām niṣasādamandrā |
catasra ūrjaṃ duduhe payāṃsi kva svidasyāḥ paramaṃ jaghāma ||*

When, uttering words which no one comprehended, Vak, Queen of Gods, the Gladdener, was seated,

The heaven's four regions drew forth drink and vigour: now whither hath her noblest portion vanished?

Rv-8.100,11: देवी वाचमजनयन्त देवास्तां विश्वरूपाः पशवो वदन्ति |
सा नो मन्द्रेषमूर्जं दुहाना धेनुर्वागस्मानुप सुष्टुतैतु ||

*devīm vācamajanayanta devāstām viśvarūpāḥ paśavo vadanti |
sā no mandreṣamūrjaṃ duhānā dhenurvāghasmānupa suṣṭutaitu ||*

The Deities generated Vak the Goddess, and animals of every figure speak her.

May she, the Gladdener, yielding food and vigour, the Milch-cow Vak, approach us mutely lauded.

The most striking observation on the verse **Rv-10.125,5** is, all the “**Knowledge Owners**” are not placed in one class, but based on their inherent capabilities of learning, generating, and

expressing themselves using **Vak/Speech**, they are identified by different names. Based on the information given in the verse **Rv-10.125,5**; the Rigvedic Priests have been categorized as follows.

1. **BrahmaNa**: A trained person who understands existing Vedic knowledge and explains the same to the common People. Since he interacts with the People, hence serves as a link between the Vedic People and the Commoners. Based on his capabilities, he may be called as the Learner and the Implementor/Performer (**Adyayan** phase-the Studious person).
2. **Rishi/Sage**: A person who is an inspired Poet, trains the many future Poets/BrahmaNas, and also simplifies or improvises the knowledge/content of the Poems that is already available. **BrahmaNa** can become a **Rishi**, when he attains mastery in a field of knowledge. **Rishi** assesses the effectiveness of **knowledge implementation** or **makes it to flow (rish)** from one generation to other (**Manan** phase- the Trainer/**Guru** for many and the Evaluator).
3. **Sumedha/Yogi**: A wise and enlightened person who formulates the new (divine) knowledge or upgrades the existing through **Sadhana** /Meditation or **Tapasya**. He considers himself closer to God, and prefers to live in isolation, away from the crowd (**Chintan** phase- the **Serious Thinker** and the **Knowledge Seeker**).

It means to say that, “All Rigvedic Priests were not equal in status”, but had different roles to play.

BrahmaNa- A Friend of the **Common People**

Rishi- A Guide of a **BrahmaNa**

Sumedha/Yogi- A Philosopher of a **Rishi**

In other words, 'A Strong Internal Desire to *Earn*, and/or *Transfer*, and/or *Create* “**Knowledge (ज्ञानम्)**” and express the same using “**Vak/ वाक्/Speech**” actually defined the “Degree of the Spiritual Leader” of the Rigvedic Time'.

Revival of “**Saraswati**” as the Goddess of Knowledge and Speech

Most probably, a few centuries after the compilation of all Ten Mandalas, the descendants of the Rigvedic Priests, taking a clue from the content of the hymn **Rv-10.125**, would have decided to give due recognition to **Goddess Vak**, but purposely identified **Her** as **Goddess Saraswati** (the most celebrated river of **Rigved** who lost its physical presence due to severe Drought/**Vritra**). Therefore, in the legends composed later on, we find **Goddess Saraswati** carrying traits of **Vidya/ विद्या/ Knowledge** as well as **Vak/वाक्/Speech**. The verse **Rv-10.125,7** links birth of **Vak** deep inside Ocean/Waters, probably indicates emergence of **Vak** through **deep thought process**.

D. When “the Knowledge overtakes the Faith” - an Example from Mandala-1:

Hymn **Rv-1.164** is commonly known as the **Riddle Hymn** wherein the Poet has indirectly highlighted the role of **God Sun** in shaping the natural features such as Day and Night, Months, Year, and the Progress of Life on Earth due to rains. Symbolical use of **Yajna** in the hymn actually confuses the reader. Following **three verses** taken from the hymn **Rv-1.164** tell us similar story.

Rv-1.164,42: *tasyāḥ samudrā adhi vi kṣaranti tena jīvanti pradiśaścatasrah |*
tataḥ kṣaratyakṣaram tad viśvamupa jīvati ||

From her descend in streams the seas of water; thereby the world's four regions have their being,
Thence flows the imperishable flood and thence the universe hath life.

Rv-1.164,47: *kṛṣṇaṁ niyānaṁ harayaḥ suparṇā apo vasānā divamut patanti |*
ta āvavrtran sadanād ṛtasyādid ghr̥tena pṛthivī vyudyate ||

Dark the descent: the birds are golden-coloured; up to the heaven they fly robed in the waters.
Again descend they from the seat of Order, and all the earth is moistened with their fatness.

Rv-1.164,51: *samānametadudakamuccaitya cāhabhiḥ |*
bhūmiṁ parjanya jīvanti divaṁ jīvantyaghnaḥ ||

Uniform, with the passing days, this water mounts and falls again.
The tempest-clouds give life to earth, and fires re-animate the heaven.

Inference: Above three verses intimate us that the **life on Earth** is due to **Rain** fallen from the sky. At the same time the Poet has underlined the fact that, the formation of the Rain-water Clouds is due to water present in the Sea/Ocean. It means to say that, the Poet of the hymn very well knows that, in reality, the Rain is caused by the **Evaporation of Sea Water due to Heat of the Sun**. He also understands that the process is **cyclic** in nature, means **periodically occurs every year**.

Now coming to the point of **Faith** of the Rigvedic Priests, since inception of **Rigved**, various Composers have re-told an age-old story of water scarcity in the region adjoining river **Saraswati** using two characters “**Indra** and **Vritra/Ahi**”. As per the well established myth, **Vritra**, **a demon** either sucks water from the rain clouds or abduct them so as to take complete water of the world in **His** captivity to compel all living beings of the world to suffer for a very long time. Additionally, **Ahi**, **a serpent** obstructs the flow of water going into all rivers of the region, and hence forces them to go dry. To defeat **Vritra/Ahi** and hence to get water released from their custody, the ancestors of the Priests shaped a new warrior god **Indra** to fight a regular war, and purposely equipped **Him** with a weapon known as **Vajra**/bolt, and high speed **Ratha** drawn by **Hari**/Two tawny Asvas. Till the end, their descendants remained faithful to the views of Old Rishis.

Without commenting on **Faith** adversely or hurting no one, the Poet of the hymn **Rv-1.164** has successfully managed to project himself as a “**Knowledge Champion**”.

E. Concluding Remarks:

- The main theme of the Rigvedic hymn **Rv-10.71** was to prepare the Priests for the future requirements by way of imparting proper training using **Yajna** as a practice. This involved not only making a person “**Poet of Fame**”, but also shaping him/her as a “**Leader**” who would continue the tradition of creation of knowledge, training and transferring the same to the next generation with a great zeal and enthusiasm.
- In the hymn **Rv-10.125**; the Poet has expressed serious concern about **Vak**, then reminded every member of the Priestly Community of that time, as each of them daily makes use of **Vak/Speech** to earn his/her living, hence like other Rigvedic Deities; **Goddess Vak** must be given due respect since **she** surely deserves better treatment from all of them.

Based on the content of the hymn **Rv-10.71**, it can be said that as compared to the **Poets of Six Family Mandalas (Mandala-2 to 7)**, during the composition of **Mandala-1 and 10 (the Last Two Mandalas)**, the Members of the Priestly Community became more flexible and open-minded as they introduced concept of proper training and contest to select the best Poet from the lot. This also manifests that unlike the **Six Family Mandalas**, a person born in a family of well known Poet (as happened earlier) now would not automatically become the “**Poet of fame**”. He or she needed to exhibit his/her caliber in presence of many to achieve the status. The change in mindset of the Priests would have occurred only when the Priests got relocated to west side of river **Sindhu** where they did not face severe water problem as experienced by them in the eastern region adjoining river **Saraswati**. Most likely during **Mandala-8**, when a section of the Priests (Bhrugus) revolted against the hardcore Priests (Angirasas and their friends) on the issue of praising an **Idle God Indra** for doing nothing, and at the end they left Rigvedic Territory in protest. This incidence would have made the Leaders of the Priests to think seriously about the continuation of a **clan culture** tradition.

From the above, one thing is crystal clear that, during the **Late Rigvedic Period**, by birth, no one was designated as a **Rishi** or **Sage-Poet**. Therefore, mostly in **Mandala-10**, and to a lesser extent in **Mandala-1**; we find novelty in the topics of composition of Rigvedic Poems.

F. Reference:

1. “**Rig Veda**”(Bilingual), Translated by **Ralph T. H. Griffith (1896)** in PDF (#).
2. **Monier-Williams Dictionary**.

“Successful knowledge building initiative would culminate into a better Society”